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ABSTRACT

Personal characteristics of adult undergraduates who are 36 years old and older were studied. A sample of 24 adult students from a state-supported, urban university were interviewed/taped, and audio recordings were reviewed for descriptions of sociodemographic and psychosocial characteristics. The dominant student profile was of a 44-year-old white, married woman, enrolled part time, who entered the university as a transfer student. Critical life incidents that precipitated college enrollment were related to important turning points within the life span. Motivation for seeking a college degree was related primarily to a lifelong valuing of learning while possibly improving job opportunities. Affordable tuition, availability of certain major programs of study, and convenient scheduling influence institutional choice. Being older than most undergraduates was not perceived as a hindrance; rather, the maturity of adulthood was viewed as an enabling factor. Data on the characteristics of the sample are provided, including respondents' occupation; educational levels attained by mother, father, spouse; learning motivations; and factors affecting college choice. Frequencies are indicated for specific learning motivations that are categorized as learning oriented, goal oriented, and activity oriented. Case studies and a bibliography are included. (Author/SW)

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The Older College Student--A Changing Tradition

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Abstract

Personal characteristics of adult undergraduate students were identified and described. Twenty-four adults, 36 years and above, enrolled in a state supported university located in a major urban area were randomly selected. Personal interviews were recorded on audio tapes and reviewed for descriptions of sociodemographic and psychosocial characteristics. The dominant student profile was of a 44 year old white, married woman, enrolled part-time, who entered the university as a transfer student. Critical life incidents which precipitated college enrollment were related to important turning points within the life span. Motivation for seeking a college degree was related primarily to a lifelong valuing of learning while possibly improving job opportunities. Affordable tuition, availability of certain major programs of study and convenient scheduling influenced institutional choice. Being older than most undergraduates was not perceived as a hindrance, rather, the maturity of adulthood was viewed as an enabling factor.

The Older College Student--A Changing Tradition

The profile of the American college student has changed. He is she and she is older. This new profile is testimony to the fact that males, 18 to 22 years of age, no longer dominate the enrollment in American institutions of higher education (Galliano & Gildea, 1982; Robinson, 1980; Margarrell, 1978; Tittle & Denker, 1980). Women now form the majority of all college students (Cowan, 1980; Fisher-Thompson, 1980; Dwinell, 1981) and adults, 25 years or older, account for over 41% of total college enrollments (Hill, Kroliczak, and Froomkin, 1982). The aging of the American college student is further emphasized by the fact that 14% of all college students are 36 years of age and over (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1980; Hill, personal communication, January 15, 1984).

Until the mid 40s, the U.S. Office of Education only reported as undergraduates those 18 to 21 years of age, and until 1972, the U.S. Bureau of Census did not report undergraduates beyond 35 years of age (Kasworm, 1980). Descriptions of older-than-traditional college students usually were available in studies about women college students or in studies about a broad category of adult learners. Studies were more likely to be about adults in programs under the aegis of adult education, cooperative or evening college, institutes of lifelong learning, or continuing education (Lindoo, 1982; Luck & Galloway, 1983; Quay, 1981). These studies showed dramatically that adults are capable, motivated learners who are important consumers of higher

education (Kasworm, 1980; Aslanian & Brickell, 1980; Cross, 1979a, Kuh, 1980).

Evidence shows that institutional and attitudinal barriers face the adult learner who seeks an undergraduate college degree. A pattern emerges of "adult education programs" sponsored by institutions of higher education. These programs are segregated from the mainstream of the traditional academic programs. Thus, adults who could not or were not encouraged to enter the ongoing, traditional undergraduate programs of the institution have been taught in academic ghettos created for "non-traditional" students (Kasworm, 1980). The Carnegie Commission on Higher Education in nationwide analyses of higher education acknowledged that older students faced undue hardships and prejudices both in the entry and the pursuit of undergraduate degree programs (1971, 1973). Despite barriers, the adult learner has persisted. As Kasworm (1980) observed: "Changing career and leisure expectations, spiralling technological obsolescence and the rising consciousness regarding the quality of life have fueled the interest and desire for adults to seek out undergraduate programs as a career development, personal enrichment and life transition medium" (p. 31).

The strongest predictor of whether an adult will participate in college or other formal learning activities has been related to prior level of educational attainment (Ramsey, 1980; Cross, 1979a; Anderson & Darkenwald, 1979; Sewall, 1982). Educational interest and participation of adult women has been related to the changing roles

of women in American society and their search for new career opportunities (Cross, 1979b). For both adult women and men, the labor market has been a major factor affecting both interest and participation in educational activities, especially when a mid-life career change occurs because of a blocked job promotion or when retraining is indicated (Cross, 1979b). Studies of adult learners dramatize the fact that the characteristics of the life span have changed. "It looks as though American society is moving away from the 'linear lifeplan' in which education is for the young, work for the middle aged, and enforced leisure for the elderly (Best & Stern, 1976), toward a blended lifeplan in which education, work and leisure go on concurrently throughout life (Cross, 1979b). The good life today is not likely to consist of all work or all study for the average adult but rather of a blend of part-time work, part-time study, and part-time leisure" (Cross, 1979a).

Information gathered from surveys has offered some important insights about adult learners. Solmon and Gordon's (1980) longitudinal study examined the largest sample of adult students to date (172,400) and identified the need for special considerations, especially in relation to conditions and procedures of college admissibility. This study raised questions about the utility and reliability of high school grades and entrance examination scores for the adult who had been out of high school for many years. In a study of over 350 adult students at the University of Houston, Malin, Dougherty, and Skinner (1979) determined that these students usually enrolled in a college

due to job dissatisfaction and expected a college education to offer them a new sense of satisfaction and fulfillment. From a survey of over 1500 adult learners, the College Entrance Examination Board concluded the following about adults who seek formal learning experiences: ". . .Most adult decisions to seek educational renewal are clearly and directly related to significant changes in their lives--changes affecting their careers, family situations, health, religion, or leisure opportunities. Going back to school is less significantly a transition in itself than a consequence of some other change, actual or anticipated, in individual circumstances" (Aslanian & Brickell, 1980, p. 14).

A review of the literature of higher education and adult education spanning the last 14 years offer these and many other important insights about adult learners. However, studies about that emerging cohort of adults 35 years of age and above who pursued an undergraduate college degree were under-represented in the literature. Thus, this study was undertaken with the intent of identifying the personal characteristics of some members of this large cohort. Unlike usual studies of adult learners which involved mailed questionnaires to large samples, this study design was predicated on the individuation and personalization of information. The plan of this study was to use personal interviews as a means to obtain demographic data and, primarily, as a way of understanding the feelings, concerns, and problems that these adults experienced in making the transition to undergraduate college student.

As noted, this transition could be influenced by a range of interpersonal factors related to family, friends or work, and intrapersonal factors as manifested in values, motivations, expectations or critical life incidents. Based on the assumption that becoming and being a college student was an appropriate role in the adult life cycle, this study explored the notion that the transition from non-student to student was the result of a dynamic interface of these interpersonal and intrapersonal factors.

Methodology

The design of this study was predicated on the belief that the most effective way to elicit a descriptive profile of the personal characteristics of adult undergraduate students was by direct personal interviewing. The design involved personal interviews with a randomly sampled group of adult undergraduates using a structured interview schedule, which was pretested for utility and clarity. I conducted the interviews with the help of two experienced interviewers who had an inherent interest in the study. All interviews were recorded on an audio tape recorder. After each interview was completed, each interviewer reviewed the tape, checked responses to each prescribed category, and wrote personal observations onto the interview schedule.

Upon completion of the interviews, the audio tapes were randomly exchanged among each of the three interviewers for review. Each interviewer-turned-rater debriefed and recorded on a blank interview schedule, without reference to initial interviewer's written analysis,

written comments and responses. Each interviewer reviewed four tapes of each of the other two interviewers for a total of eight reviews. As principal investigator, I reviewed each set of two questionnaires (for a total of 48) completed on each subject in the sample to validate areas of agreement and disagreement. To resolve any disagreements between the interviewer and the rater, I reviewed the audio tape and then discussed the responses in question with both the initial interviewer and the rater. If no single interpretation could be agreed upon, the responses were not included in the findings.

The Sample

Twenty-four students 36 years of age and above enrolled in identified undergraduate degree programs in a major public, urban university were randomly selected to be interviewed. Thirty-six years was chosen as the base age, on the assumption that by that age adults were not completing a college education initiated within the usual undergraduate age category of 18 to 24 years. Each student had applied for admission and was accepted as an undergraduate with the 3-year period prior to this study. All were actively enrolled in a baccalaureate degree program of study, part-time or full-time, during the two academic quarter periods when the sample was selected and interviews conducted. They entered the university as either a beginning freshman or a transfer student at any level. The sample consisted of 7 men and 17 women; 19 were white and 5 black.

Access to the population was through the computerized student information record system of the institution's undergraduate admissions office. The population was identified by the university as within 2% of accuracy (due to computer fallibility and/or incomplete student records) and consisted of 397 actively enrolled students. An additional 431 adults, 36 years and above, were identified through the records but were eliminated as part of the population due to their inactive status, a familiar category in a city university where students drop in or out of school due to demands of work, family, finances or scheduling. To obtain a viable sample, the population was further refined with the random selection of 66 names from 397 actively enrolled students. A letter of introduction then was sent to all 66 individuals. This letter described the study, and the fact that they may be randomly selected to be interviewed, but also had the option to volunteer to be interviewed. The list of 66 adult students was divided into 3 different sample groups of 22. Each interviewer finally randomly selected 8 individuals for the total sample of 24, including 5 who volunteered to be interviewed after receiving the letter of introduction. Those who volunteered were randomly distributed within the total sample. The final sample of 24 represented 6% of the total identified university population (397) of adult students 36 years and above.

The Instrument

The questionnaire that served as the basis of the audio tape interview focused on the essential question of this study: What are

the personal characteristics of adult undergraduate students? This questionnaire was divided into five sections: 1) Face sheet for primary sociodemographic data (sex, race/ethnicity, occupation, marital status, educational levels of family members); 2) Purpose(s) for enrolling in college, based upon a paradigm of adult learner orientations as conceptualized by Houle (1961) and as elaborated by Harvey (1978); 3) Reason(s) for matriculating at the institution where the study was based using student information forms adapted from materials developed by the American Council on Education (1972) and Williams (1977); 4) Identification of critical life experiences of the life cycle which influenced the decision to become an undergraduate student in relation to D. J. Levinson, Darrow, Klein, M. H. Levinson, and McKee's (1978) 11 components; 5) Perception(s) of being older-than-traditional age undergraduates.

Processing of Data

Given the case-by-case nature of the study, the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (Nie, Hull, Jenkins, Steinbrenner and Brent, 1975) was used to compute frequencies and to characterize, when appropropriate, relationships between and among variables.

Findings

The interviews provided a range of information about the characteristics of adult undergraduate students.

Sociodemographic Characteristics

The dominant profile of the adult undergraduates in the sample was female, white, married and 44.1 years old. They entered as

freshmen and were enrolled part-time (Table 1). Most were employed in positions that required some identified skill training. Only one was retired; three were unemployed (Table 2). Most interviewed had exceeded the formal educational level of their parents, and most of those who were married or formerly married described spouses with exposure to a college education (Table 3).

Description of other sociodemographic characteristics of the adult students are included in the Appendix according to gender (Table A-1), race/ethnicity (Table A-2), marital status (Table A-3) and entry status (Table A-4).

Case Example. Mrs. T is 44, white, and the mother of 2 children, who are 19 and 21 years old. She is employed as a registered nurse in a major general hospital and is enrolled in a program of undergraduate nursing studies on a part-time basis. Mrs. T entered the university as a freshman 16 years after graduating high school. Mrs. T's mother had graduated high school. Her father had taken some college courses. Her husband has a baccalaureate degree, and her two children were attending colleges, also.

Representativeness of the Sample

Gender and race/ethnicity were the only characteristics identified on all student records. In order to understand the potential representativeness of those interviewed, comparisons of these characteristics were made between the sample (24) and the university population (397) of adult undergraduates.

Table 1

Frequency Table: Adult Undergraduates (N = 24)

Variables	Frequency
Sex	
Male	7
Female	17
Race/Ethnicity	
White	19
Black	5
Entry Status	
Transfer	10
Entering Freshman	14
Marital Status	
Married	14
Single	1
Divorced	7
Widowed	2
Course Load	
Full-Time	6
Part-Time	18
Age Range	38-66
Mean Age	44.1

Table 2

Frequency Table: Occupations (N = 24)

Variables	Frequency
Occupations	
Bank Assistant Vice President	1
Dental Hygenist	1
Electronic Technician	1
Housewife	4
Insurance Underwriter	1
Marketing Director	1
Mechanic	1
Nurse	2
Office Manager	1
Post Office Clerk	1
Production Worker	1
Real Estate Appraiser & Broker	1
Retired	1
Secretary	2
Technical School Instructor	1
Training Coordinator	1
Unemployed	3

Table 3

Frequency Table: Family Education (N = 24)

Variables	Frequency		
Family Educational Levels	Mother	Father	Spouse*
Grammar School or Less	7	12	0
Some High School	6	3	2
High School Graduate	9	5	6
Some College	0	2	4
College Degree	0	0	9
Some Graduate School	0	0	0
Graduate Degree	1	1	2
Unknown	1	1	1

*Includes responses about former spouses, deceased or divorced

The proportion of men and women in the sample was the same as that in the original population of 397--29% male and 71% female. The chi square further supported the fact that there was no significant difference between the sample and the population according to gender: $\chi^2(1, N = 24) = .00, p<.05$.

The sample consisted of 69% white students and 21% black students as contrasted to the adult student population (397) of 81.3% white and 14.7% black. In this category, 4% of the population were listed as either Oriental, Hispanic, or "unidentified" and none from either of these categories was randomly selected into the sample. A chi square also indicated no significant difference between the sample and population according to race/ethnicity: $\chi^2(1, N = 24) = .46, p<.05$.

Psychosocial Characteristics

A major assumption of this study was that an understanding of adult undergraduates would be enhanced by descriptive information that reflected personal thoughts, feelings, and ideas. Thus, the interviews focused on motivations to seek formal learning experiences; factors influencing institutional choice; and the experience of being older-than-traditional age undergraduates.

Orientation

The assumption was made that despite the diversity of the students' backgrounds and personalities, there would be similar orientations to learning within a formal environment. To focus clearly and classify these orientations, Harvey's (1978) elaboration of Houle's (1961)

three categories of orientation of adult learners were utilized. Houle's initial study of adults' interest in continuing education was predicated on the belief that the desire to learn was not a human characteristic shared by everyone. Through interviews, he postulated that adults seeking formal learning experiences may have one or more orientations: 1) Learning oriented--education to achieve knowledge for its own sake; 2) goal oriented--education as a means for accomplishing specific objectives; 3) activity oriented--education as something to do with no necessary connection with content (Houle, 1961). Harvey (1978) elaborated these orientations with subsets of descriptors which provided additional means for understanding the adult student.

The responses of the 24 adults (Tables 4, 5, 6) interviewed suggested that their enrollment in a program of undergraduate studies was not prompted by a search for social activities or new personal relationships, but rather the attainment of knowledge as an expression of a lifelong value, while improving their self images and preparing for new career challenges.

Case Example. Mr. B is a 36 year old divorced black male, employed as a mechanic with the city transit company. He is enrolled in a program leading to a degree in child care administration. He graduated from high school when he was 25 years old and considered himself to be a "late bloomer." As a single parent, Mr. B saw the importance of upgrading his skills for employment and preparing for the future, but repeatedly stated that his only purpose at the university was

Table 4

Frequency Table: Learning Oriented

Variables	Frequency of Responses
To continue to enjoy learning. I have periodically taken courses and/or used the library to learn new things.	18
To continue my preference for this type of activity.	14
To be knowledgeable about new events and findings. I participate continously in learning new things.	17
To learn new concepts is more important to me than anything else in life.	10
To gain knowledge. This is valuable to me.	22
Total:	81

Table 5

Frequency Table: Goal Oriented

Variables	Frequency of Responses
To become more effective in my present work	8
To learn new skills in order to qualify for a different job	13
To increase my earning potential by job advancement or promotion	8
To develop a sense of self confidence and for self improvement	23
To be able to demonstrate a new ability and knowledge to my friends and associates	9
Total:	61

Table 6

Frequency Table: Activity Oriented

Variables	Frequency of Responses
To get together with other people	5
To be able to make new acquaintances and new friends	
To be able to obtain some diversion from my problems	6
To continue learning from a teacher I like	2
To avoid boredom and have something to do	6
Total:	25

to enjoy learning with the thought that some day he could also learn to write an effective paper. Being a student was but one of a variety of roles--parent, worker, church volunteer--he had assumed. However, when examining all the demands and pressures of the many roles, Mr. B seemed pleased and satisfied with the commitment and responsibilities required to pursue his love of learning. He observed that the need for degree education was particularly important for blacks. Mr. B stated that during the 1960s and 1970s, blacks could get by being "black and having street knowledge," but he believed that life in the 1980s would demand a college education.

Institutional Choice

The university in which the students were enrolled is in a major metropolitan area with numerous privately sponsored junior and senior colleges, two universities, and dozens of specialized institutes. Six publicly funded institutions of higher education also are located in the area. With this opportunity for institutional choice, an essential element was to identify the reason(s) for finally enrolling in this particular institution, a large public university in the center of a major southern city.

Using a check list developed from materials of the American Council on Education (1972) and Williams (1977), reasons given for this specific institutional choice were tabulated (Table 7). The four dominant reasons were: 1) Affordable tuition; 2) availability of a specific program of study; 3) proximity of the university to

Table 7

Frequency Table: Reasons for Institutional Choice

Variables	Frequency of Responses
Influence of family	6
Academic reputation of the university	7
Availability of financial assistance	2
Friends are attending same university	0
Affordable tuition	15
Availability of advisement	4
Availability of specific program of studies	13
Proximity to home	10
No other college nearby	1
State sponsored (public institution)	3
Night classes schedule	1
Convenient to public transportation	1
Heterogeneous student population	1
Good teaching facilities	1
Off campus program	1

student's homes, and 4) the academic reputation of the university. In this study, the tuition of the state funded institution was lower than private universities in the general geographical area. This university was conveniently available to public bus and rail transportation and adjacent to major highway interchanges. The students interviewed in this study usually suggested that they had identified their choice of major studies before entering the university and knew that this institution offered competent instructors in their chosen areas.

Critical Life Incidents

The decision to enter a baccalaureate college program was presumed to be related to one or more significant special events in the life course of the adult. Levinson's et al. (1978) study of adults and their development provided a helpful model for examining the life course of the students, especially because, as in Levinson's et al. study, interviewing was the essential research method. Levinson et al. (1978) associated major decisions of adults to be influenced by family, friends, work, groups, or health or illness. As in Levinson et al., this study tried to understand an individual's life course by permitting reflection upon "the entire life sequence from childhood to the present: family of origin; marriage and family of procreation (in which the man is husband and father); important relationships with men and women; education; occupational choice and work history; leisure; involvement in ethnic, religious, political and other interests, illness; death and loss of loved

ones; good times and bad time; turning points in the life course" (Levinson et al. 1978, p. 15).

Fifteen replied that their pursuit of an undergraduate education was a response to turning points in life. Most explained the reason for this response in terms of change--separation by death of a family member or friend; personal illness; divorce, and a subsequent life transition. A life transition was usually explained as essentially a personal experience which resulted from an in-depth evaluation of the present in relation to the future. Nine related their decision to occupational choice or work history, which translated to preparing for a career change or a job promotion. Eight identified the family of procreation as the basis for their decisions. Most frequently this meant that a spouse or children encouraged or supported the interviewee to obtain a college degree (Table 8).

Case Example. Miss M's interview highlighted the meaning of a turning point in the life course. She is 66 years old and recently retired from a job she had for many years. As a single woman she devoted herself to her job, her neices and nephews and her church. When she retired, Miss M saw the opportunity and need to go to college despite the fact that she had graduated high school 44 years before applying to college. For her, retirement provided the ultimate turning point with the reflection that "It's like starting life all over again. It (retirement) gives you a new direction and you begin to think about what is the most important thing to do."

Table 8

Frequency Table: Critical Life Areas

Variables	Frequency of Responses
Family of origin	5
Family of procreation	8
Important relationships with men and women	3
Education	4
Occupational choice/work history	9
Leisure	1
Involvement in ethnic, religious, political and other interests	2
Illness	0
Death and loss of loved ones	4
Good times and bad times	2
Turning points in the life course	15

Age

In an environment usually associated with youth, being over 36 years of age was an inherent and important variable in this study. The responses of the 24 conveyed the impression that being older than the usual college undergraduate was not problematic. A review of spontaneously offered comments highlighted a perception that the institution had conveyed a sense of awareness and often appreciation of the interviewees' adultness in relation to such attributes as maturity, responsibility, commitment, experience, self-directedness, and a readiness to learn (Table 9). Time between school experiences, not age, was seen as a complicating factor. The need for high school grade transcripts and the requirement to take college admissions tests were seen as troublesome if not inappropriate for the adult who had been out of school for many years. Adjusting or readjusting to a formal learning environment was viewed by some as a challenge rather than a disruption. Some expressed concern about instructors who were not sensitive or understanding of the adult personality or learning patterns in contrast to that of the usual classroom population of young people. None, however, felt there should be any special considerations from either instructor or younger classmates. Also, several thought that younger students enjoyed the presence of older students.

Case Example. At 53, Mrs. S enjoyed being the oldest student in many of her classes. Her l e responsibilities were easily orchestrated among family, college and work. She observed that

Table 9

Frequency Table: Age as a Factor in Being an Undergraduate College Student

Variables	Frequency
Responses	
Experience	6
Expectations	5
Openness	8
Responsibility	2
Commitment	3
Respect	2
Relationships	1
Generation Gap	5
Maturity	2
Self-Directed	8
Learning to Study	2

unlike many young students, her motivation to go to college was not a response to any parental societal pressures but to a very personally directed decision. As a "middle-age" adult, her responsibilities as a parent were fewer, which released her to invest time and energies in a college education. Mrs. S emphasized that being an older college student had an advantage, because the usual problems of youth were resolved. For her, there was now a clearer sense of self-direction.

Discussion

The existing literature on adults in higher education is diffuse. There is a tendency to discuss adult learners in relation to programs of adult education, continuing education or evening school. The "adult" in adult student has not been differentiated extensively according to age cohort or type of educational program. Thus, this study was predicated on the assumption that it was necessary and appropriate to distinguish between adult education and adults in education, and to describe the characteristics of these adults in education from their own perspectives.

A review of the literature offered a variety of insights about adult learners. Many studies offered statistical tabulations that dramatized the changing patterns of college populations with enrollment of older-than-traditional students. Some studies investigated the differences between younger and older students, and some discussed some characteristic differences among adult learners. Some studies also examined adult students from an administrative perspective and

developed ideas and concerns about the implications of this age shift on student recruitment and retainment.

This study was designed to go beyond other studies by literally getting with adults who made the decision to be college undergraduates. The use of individual interviews provided access to some personal feelings and experiences about being an adult and a student. The 24 adults talked freely about their aspirations, their dreams, and their frustrations, as well as the satisfactions and disappointments in their personal and academic lives. Most important, the adults shared information because they believed they would be helping other adult students who would come after them while understanding more clearly where they had been and where they hoped to go.

This study was possible and necessary because adults 36 years of age have emerged as a viable and identifiable cohort of college students. Statistically, the sample and the population from which it was taken were similar, which permits some generalization of findings. The mean age of all students interviewed was 44.1 years. This age falls within the period of the life cycle which Levinson et al. (1978) described as one of Mid-life Transition. Many indeed saw their college education as an expression of a transition that was the result of many turning points related to life, death, divorce, occupation, or of an existential determinism of seeking to fulfill the unfulfilled.

These adults clearly experienced their commitment to and belief in the value of education. As they reflected upon Houle's (1961)

activity orientation to learning, it held a lower priority for the 24 interviewed. Those interviewed felt that social needs were met outside the university envirnoment.

As the study continued it became apparent that age or being older-than-traditional undergraduate students was not a deterrent to being an undergraduate. These were adults who viewed undergraduate education as natural and appropriate. They were prepared to address themselves to the business of higher education with a complete sense of responsibility. They valued their adulthood and its reward of maturity (sometimes fought for with vigor) with its inherent sense of self-directedness. Adulthood was the period of life when family or personal responsibilities were lessened and energies could be directed for one's own self-interest.

The interviews helped bring into focus the impression that these adults were highly engaged, articulate individuals. (Maybe these traits could be used to distinguish students from non-students). They conveyed an inherent belief in themselves as men and women who had the commitment and capacity to learn, to change, and to grow. A college education was seen as part of an orderly life, not as a response to crisis but a response to some usual dramatic life experiences.

A necessary observation from the findings of this study is the homogeneous nature of the responses. Despite an age range of 30 years, different cultural/ethnic backgrounds and a range of different personal life experiences, the combined responses of all 24 pointed to the profile of a mature adult who had chosen to pursue a college degree

with determination. They identified learning as their primary goal, and besides the convenience of location and affordable tuition of the university, enrolled because of the availability of a specific program of study.

Earlier in this study it was reported that statistically similarities existed between the sample of 24 and the population of 397 in relation to the key demographic characteristics of gender and race/ethnicity. Therefore, it may be appropriate to suggest that the individuals interviewed may reflect other dominant characteristics of this paricular university's adult population. Although it may be highly speculative to suggest that these characteristics are reflective of all adult undergraduates, I suggest that adults who choose the role of student may reflect similar orientations, motivations and personal life circumstances.

In many respects, the importance of this study may be seen in relation to the research methodology. This was a descriptive study that was predicated on the belief that understanding the adult undergraduate required, in Houle's terms, an examination of the ". . .people who are most actively engaged. If we are ever to understand the total phenomenon of. . .education, we must begin by understanding the nature, the beliefs, and the actions of those who take part to the highest degree" (Houle, 1961, pp. 9-10). As in Houle's study (1961) of 22 adults in programs of continuing education, it must be acknowledged that in no sense were the 24 individuals interviewed in this study assumed to

be a representative sample of all adult undergraduates. These cases, as reported and summarized, provided insights that should be acknowledged as potentially indicative of a growing population of college students. Despite the diverse background of the interviewed students, there was clustering of responses. "They all had goals which they wished to achieve, they all found the process of learning enjoyable or significant and they all felt that learning was worthwhile for its own sake" (Houle, 1961, p. 15). These commonly shared responses showed how an undergraduate college education could be a significant part of dealing with changing human conditions.

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Appendix

Appendix A-1

Frequency Table: Gender (N = 24)

Variables	Frequency	
	Male	Female
Race/Ethnicity		
White	4	15
Black	3	2
Entry Status		
Transfer	2	8
Entering Freshman	5	9
Marital Status		
Married	5	9
Single	0	1
Divorced	2	5
Widowed	0	2
Course Load		
Full-Time	0	6
Part-Time	7	11
Mean Age	40.3	45.7

Appendix A-2

Frequency Table: Race/Ethnicity (N = 24)

Variables	Frequency	
	White	Black
Sex		
Male	4	3
Female	15	2
Entry Status		
Transfer	10	1
Entering Freshman	9	4
Marital Status		
Married	12	2
Single	1	0
Divorced	4	3
Widowed	2	0
Course Load		
Full-Time	6	0
Part-Time	13	5
Mean Age	45.7	38

Appendix A-3

Frequency Table: Marital Status (N = 24)

Variables	Frequency			
	Married	Single	Divorced	Widowed
Sex				
Male	5	0	2	0
Female	9	1	5	2
Entry Status				
Transfer	8	0	2	0
Entering Freshman	6	1	5	2
Race/Ethnicity				
White	12	1	4	2
Black	2	0	3	0
Course Load				
Full-Time	3	0	2	1
Part-Time	11	1	5	1
Mean Age	43.6	66	40.7	48.5

Appendix A-4

Frequency Table: Entry Status (N = 24)

Variables	Frequency	
	Transfer	Entering Freshman
Sex		
Male	2	5
Female	8	9
Race/Ethnicity		
White	9	10
Black	1	4
Marital Status		
Married	8	6
Single	0	1
Divorced	0	2
Widowed	2	5
Course Load		
Full-Time	4	2
Part-Time	6	12
Mean Age	40.6	47.3